

Ohio Heritage Partnership: A Statewide Initiative

The State Library of Ohio, in partnership with the Ohio Historical Society, is applying for an IMLS Connecting to Collections Planning Grant for Ohio.

Need and Rationale

The findings of the *Heritage Health Index* (HHI) have found that nationally the collections of all types of collecting institutions are in trouble. Many institutions do not have adequate environmental conditions, staffing and/or funding. Ohio reflects this national situation. In fact, a lack of care and preservation of Ohio's cultural heritage has reached a crisis point. It is essential that this crisis be addressed if Ohio's cultural heritage is to be saved. All cultural heritage institutions that hold documents and artifacts in the public trust have a stake in this effort. Some must be made to understand that this crisis exists. Others understand full well the situation but need resources to deal with it. Every organization has a role in responding to and solving this crisis.

Ohio is rich with libraries, historical societies, museums, genealogy societies, and government entities, all of which have artifacts, documents and records held in the public trust. The degree to which these documents have been preserved and are accessible varies greatly from institution to institution. We estimate that there are 6,227 collecting organizations in Ohio, though the actual number is unknown. There are 251 public library systems, 138 academic institutions, 450 historical societies, 300 members of the Ohio Museums Association, 88 county governments and approximately 5,000 units of local government. These figures do not include school libraries, special libraries and small historical and genealogical societies which go unnoticed.

Ohio collecting institutions are traditionally independent and autonomous entities. Many are linked through statewide professional organizations such as the Ohio Association for Historical Societies and Museums, the Ohio Museums Association, or the Ohio Genealogical Society. The proliferation of collecting entities permits nearly every Ohio community to document its past. Unfortunately, it is rare that these organizations collaborate or partner in order to efficiently and effectively care for their collections. In addition, there is often little or no communication among agencies with similar missions or materials. The poor economy has helped to create incremental steps toward greater collaboration among a limited number of institutions in Ohio. The Ohio Historical Records Advisory Board (OHRAB) has been revitalized. The State Library of Ohio and the Ohio Historical Society began, in July 2008, a collaborative project using Content DM digital management system to provide improved access to their growing digital collections. And, there has been an increase in the number of Library Services and Technology Act grant applications that include a library/museum partnership. An IMLS Connecting to Collections Planning Grant will allow the major partners to build upon this changing environment.

Preservation of and access to collections held in the public trust has not been a priority at either the state or local levels in Ohio. Unlike many states, Ohio does not provide state

funding or grants for preservation or conservation. In addition, due to state budget rescissions in 2008, the Ohio Historical Society was forced to eliminate its paper conservation program. An extremely tight state budget means that the State Library and the Ohio Historical Society are hard pressed to allocate even minimal resources to assist cultural institutions with preservation and conservation in the foreseeable future. Funding restrictions are affecting local organizations as well. Yet, as evidenced by the number of small and medium sized museums and archives in Ohio that have applied for the Connecting to Collections Bookshelves, there is a need and a desire to protect Ohio's cultural resources.

The Planning Process

Prior to beginning the implementation of any of the Heritage Health Index goals, Ohio must compile a database of collecting institutions that includes: contact information, size of institution, size and diversity of collections, number of trained staff, institutional budgets, access to professional development, and access to professional services. With funding from the IMLS Connecting to Collections Planning Grant, the partners will be able to develop a comprehensive directory of collecting institutions and at the same time assess the state of collections in Ohio as measured against the recommendations of the Heritage Health Index.

The two primary partners implementing this grant are the State Library of Ohio and the Ohio Historical Society (OHS) (in addition to serving as the state's historical agency, state archives, and state historic preservation office, OHS also works closely with OHRAB, OAHSM, the Society of Ohio Archivists, and the Ohio Museums Association). The State Library and OHS will be jointly responsible for completing this grant project. The State Library will serve as the fiscal agent for the grant.

The State Library and OHS have created a team of senior level staff to accomplish the plan set forth in this proposal. The team includes the following individuals:

James Strider, Director, Collections, Historic Preservation, Statewide Outreach (OHS)
Jelain Chubb, State Archivist, (OHS)
Angela O'Neal, Digital Projects Manager (OHS)
Jody Blankenship, Outreach Projects Manager (OHS)
Roger Verny, Deputy State Librarian (State Library)
Missy Lodge, Head, Library Programs & Development (State Library)

The Ohio Historical Records Advisory Board (OHRAB), the central body for historical records planning in the state, will also take part in the project, as it is central to the Board's mission of "advocating, nurturing, and advising programs that identify, preserve, and provide access to their documentary heritage, which enriches the culture and protects the rights of Ohioans." OHRAB members will provide advice and counsel throughout the process and the Board will also seek to provide some additional funding for this endeavor through its State and National Partnership Grant application to the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

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The Project Partners will create a Steering Committee for the project which is broadly representative of the Ohio institutions responsible for preserving, protecting and providing access to historical collections. Advisory Committee representatives will be selected from the following institutions:

Ohio Museums Association (OMA)

Ohio Association of Historical Societies and Museums (OAHSM)

Ohio Historic Records Advisory Board (OHRAB)

Society of Ohio Archivists (SOA)

Ohio Library Council (OLC)

County Archives and Record Management Association (CARMA)

Academic Library Association of Ohio (ALAO)

Public History Programs of State Universities

Kent State University School of Library and Information Science

Ohio Preservation Council

Ohio Genealogical Society (OGS)

Intermuseum Conservation Association (ICA)

Other stakeholders from Ohio cultural heritage institutions may be asked to provide specific information, resources, and/or services during the project.

This project will begin in May 2009. The official announcement and kick off will coincide with the Society of American Archivists' May Day – Save our Archives events on May 1, 2009. May Day is a time when archivists and other cultural heritage professionals take personal and professional responsibility for doing something simple – something that can be accomplished in a day but that can have a significant impact on an individual's or a repository's ability to respond to emergencies. We believe this is an excellent opportunity to highlight the crisis conditions that exist and engage collecting institutions in responding to this "emergency".

Implementation Steps:

1. Needs Assessment: Conduct a needs assessment of Ohio's collecting organizations: A consultant will be hired to gather data on these organizations. The consultant will work with the project partners as well as the Advisory Committee to develop a web- and paper-based survey that will assess institutions' capability to 1.) provide safe conditions for collections, 2.) deal with emergencies that threaten collections, and 3.) provide adequate resources to care for the collections. In addition to a survey, the consultant will conduct phone interviews with several key leaders in this area. Tom Claeson, PALINET, has been selected as the consultant for the project.
2. Directory: Currently, no comprehensive directory exists that profiles collecting institutions in Ohio. Data will include contact information, types of resources held, size of institution, number of trained professional staff, size of budget, access to professional development, and access to professional services. Once complete, the directory will be accessible via the project partners' websites.

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3. State of Ohio's Historical Collections Summit: Institutional and governmental officials will be invited to a summit at which we will present a detailed summary of the needs assessment findings. The Summit will tentatively be held in May 2010. Because many of the issues and concerns are regionally based, the summit will be followed by regional meetings.
4. Regional Meetings: A minimum of five regional meetings will be held around the state allowing local institutional and governmental officials to discuss the state of historical collections at regional and local levels. Regional meetings will allow for a broad range of participation. Participants in the regional meetings will discuss the needs assessment findings and their impact on institutions and collections in the region. Facilitators will ask participants to identify immediate and future preservation and conservation priorities. Finally, regional meetings will integrate a training component focused on generating awareness and advocacy for collections care.
5. Ohio Cultural Heritage Strategic Plan: After analyzing information collected through the needs assessment and following the Summit and Regional Meetings, the team representing the primary partners, with assistance from Tom Clareson, will develop and disseminate a strategic plan for implementing the recommendations of the HHI. We believe that this plan will energize entities with no history of collaboration toward leveraging their resources to achieve the goals identified in the Plan.
6. Statewide Media Campaign: Part of disseminating the Ohio Cultural Heritage Strategic Plan will be a statewide media campaign that will call attention to the condition of Ohio's historical collections, the need for preservation, and the citizenry's responsibility to support such endeavors. Statewide media materials will be scalable to local media markets.

In conjunction with the IMLS Connecting to Collections Planning Grant, the project partners will request additional funding from the Ohio Humanities Council, the Ohio Arts Council, and the Society of Ohio Archivists to enhance this effort's media and advocacy campaigns.

Products delivered through the planning process will be 1.) a needs assessment tool, 2.) a summary of the needs assessment, 3.) a directory of Ohio's collecting institutions, 4.) a statewide summit, 5.) a series of regional meetings, and 6.) the Ohio Cultural Heritage Strategic Plan.

Project Resources: Budget and Personnel

Primary Personnel: Project partners will be responsible for seeing that all aspects of the project are completed, including working with the consultant to design a needs assessment, creating a directory, organizing the statewide summit and regional meetings,

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and completing all necessary reports for IMLS. The primary contact person for OHS is James Strider and the State Library primary contact person is Missy Lodge. The State Library will act as fiscal agent.

In conjunction with the project partners, the consultant will develop a needs assessment, analyze and report on the needs assessment data, create a directory of Ohio's collecting institutions, and assist in drafting the Ohio Cultural Heritage Strategic Plan. The State Library and OHS have begun initial discussions with Tom Claeson, PALINET, to plan and create the survey instrument, analyze the needs assessment data, assist in creating the directory, and contribute to producing a strategic plan to address the recommendations set forth by the HHI. Mr. Claeson is a representative from the Society of American Archivists to the Joint Committee on Archives, Libraries, and Museums, serves on the Board of Trustees of Heritage Preservation, and acted as consultant on previous Connecting to Collections Planning Grants. Students enrolled in Ohio's public history and library science masters programs will be recruited to assist with the development of the directory.

Major Budget Expenses:

1. Cost to hire a consultant
2. Expenses associated with the Summit and Regional Meetings
3. Expenses associated with facilitating the work of the Steering Committee and Advisory Council
4. Expenses associated with the production and distribution of the Strategic Plan

Sustainability: The activities associated with the IMLS Connection to Collections Planning Grant will re-energize many cultural heritage institutions regarding this critical issue. They will also facilitate partnerships among libraries, historical societies and museums. The contact list from the directory will serve as a vehicle for sustaining the discussion on the preservation of cultural heritage materials. We hope that an ultimate result of these efforts will be greater financial support from governmental entities at the state and local level.